

United States Senate

June 2, 2023

Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write today regarding U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) rulemaking on the transportation of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) by rail.

I am grateful that under your leadership within President Biden's Administration, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has taken swift action to pause implementation of a Trump Administration rule that allowed bulk transportation of LNG by railcar anywhere in the nation in order to further study this issue. As you know, PHMSA is also proposing to go further and permanently suspend this rule.

I support these actions because I share the concerns of many communities in New Jersey that the transportation of LNG by rail would have significant impacts on public safety. If the Trump-era LNG by Rail rule is ever permitted to go into effect, the risk posed to New Jersey, which is the most densely populated state in the nation with numerous freight railways, is particularly high. To fully understand this risk, we need look no further than recent and historic freight train derailments in New Jersey and across the country.

The derailment of a freight train transporting hazardous substances in East Palestine, Ohio, on February 3rd is a startling reminder of the need for additional rail safety measures to ensure that communities are safe from harm. The East Palestine derailment resulted in disaster for communities in both Ohio and western Pennsylvania, and it demonstrated the safety risks associated with transporting hazardous materials by rail. As you know, the devastating environmental impacts of this derailment are under investigation and may persist far into the future.

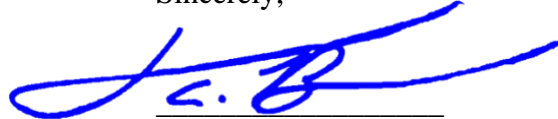
In 2012, a train carrying vinyl chloride derailed while crossing a creek in Paulsboro, New Jersey, releasing approximately 23,000 gallons of the toxic gas into the waterway and air. The incident led to the evacuation of hundreds of New Jerseyans, dozens of which sought medical attention. Health officials determined that the chemical leak caused short-term but harmful health effects.

These derailments are an unfortunate reminder of the dangers of rail transport of hazardous materials, particularly highly flammable and potentially explosive cargo, and the urgent need to strengthen safety protocols and emergency response policies.

As the USDOT and PHMSA work to finalize a rule regarding the movement of LNG by rail, I urge you to prioritize public safety in your analysis. A final rule must protect the safety and health of people in New Jersey and around the country, first responders, emergency personnel, and workers.

I appreciate all of the work that USDOT is undertaking to improve rail safety in the wake of the East Palestine derailment, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this particular safety issue and to do much more to strengthen transportation safety across the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Booker', with a horizontal line underneath.

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator